

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Athens Metro workers in 24-hour strike

Subway and urban rail workers in Athens went on a 24-hour strike on January 1 to demand the government reverse its decision on cutting wages.

Greek authorities intend to place a number of state companies on a single pay schedule from the start of the year, resulting in large wage cuts. The transport workers' previous protest against austerity measures took place in December.

Cleaning workers on London Underground in 48-hour strike

London Underground (LU) station cleaners began a 48-hour strike Monday in a dispute over pay.

The Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union had announced that members working for Initial and ISS contractors would not turn up for work for two days.

A spokesman from ISS said it was "delivering a full service" on the lines it controls—the Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines, and LU said it did not expect Tube services to be affected.

A group of workers picketed outside King's Cross station, in central London, on Monday morning.

London Tube drivers take action on Boxing Day

On December 26, London Underground (LU) drivers took industrial action in a long-running dispute over bank holiday pay.

It is the third successive year that Tube drivers have voted by over 90 percent to take action on what is the first day of the post-Christmas sales.

UK Department for Work and Pensions workers vote on strike over job losses

Eighty thousand Public and Commercial Services union members in the

department responsible for getting people back into employment are voting on whether to strike in a dispute over jobs.

The PCS launched the ballot in protest at a number of compulsory redundancies. According to the union, notices have been issued to 40 administrative assistants and three admin officers in jobcentres, benefit offices and call centres.

Balloting closes on January 10 and the first strike could take place towards the end of the month, followed by an overtime ban.

British Driving Agency workers strike over office closures, job losses

Workers at dozens of offices run by the Driving and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) across England, Scotland and Wales are staging a 24-hour strike Friday in a dispute over closures and job losses.

Council workers in Neath Port Talbot, Wales, could take action over cuts

A ballot on industrial action could be held among workers employed by Neath Port Talbot Council, Wales, over its plans to implement a combination of service cuts, council tax increases, wage cuts and increased fees and charges.

The Unison union says a series of "myths" are being utilised by the authority around its predicted £21 million budget shortfall over the next three years. The proposed pay cuts would affect those already on the lowest salaries among the council's 6,200 workforce.

Jersey bus workers in 24-hour strike

Jersey bus workers began a 24-hour strike over changes to their terms and conditions this week. With operator CT Plus Jersey replacing Connex this month, one driver estimated that some workers would lose at least £100 a week as a result of limits on working hours.

The union Unite balloted 82 percent of the workforce and 87 percent of those balloted voted in favour of the action. Bus workers also went on strike for two days in October over the changes.

Young French doctors in holiday strike over working conditions

The French National Association of Young General Practitioners (SNJMG), which claims to represent around 1,200 general practitioners, resident physicians, relief doctors and interns, called a limited strike over the Christmas and New Year period over deteriorating working conditions.

The doctors continued to see patients during working hours, but refusing to be available “on-call”. The union’s president, Alexandre Husson, told RFI the strike was necessary to highlight long working hours, poor pay and a lack of support, especially in rural areas.

“Doctors end up spending 60 to 70 hours a week in their office, and they have no family life... The non-medical tasks an isolated doctor has to take care of are enormous: organising appointments, dealing with administrative paperwork ... they are overloaded with work, and that creates frustration all around. The patients aren’t happy: they have the feeling that the doctor is just trying to get them out of the office as quickly as possible,” he said.

Portuguese New Year’s Day rail strike

A coalition of trade unions, representing Comboios de Portugal (CP), called a New Year’s Day nationwide rail strike against government-imposed austerity measures and labour reforms.

The strike was called by the Sindicato Independente dos Operacionais Ferroviários e Afins (SIOFA), Sindicato Nacional dos Trabalhadores do Sector Ferroviário (SNTSF) and the Associação Sindical das Chefias Intermédias de Exploração Ferroviária (ASCEF).

Widespread cancellations have been confirmed, primarily in the country’s two major metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto. Most of the country’s railway, bus and underground services were shut down on Christmas Day as strike warnings were issued for the period from December 18 to January 2.

Estonian airline workers to strike

Pilots at the Estonian national airline, Estonian Air, plan to begin an indefinite strike January 7 as a result of unsuccessful collective agreement with employers.

The association demands keeping the same terms as in the previous agreement signed in May 2008.

Estonian Air Cabin Crew Union (ESSA) and Estonian Air have signed a new collective agreement which is valid up till the end of 2013.

According to the *Baltic Times*, “The provisions of the Collective Agreement are extended to all Employees of the Department of Cabin Crew of Estonian Air, regardless of their trade union membership. The Collective Agreement is regulating duty and rest time, working conditions, social guarantees, salary and relations between the airline and the Trade Union.”

Shipping company workers strike at Ezz Steel factory in Suez

Around 200 shipping workers subcontracted by Banha Engineering International Co., which controls shipment operations for Ezz Steel factory in Suez, Egypt, staged a strike December 25 to protest against

deteriorating safety conditions.

The strike halted all production at the Ezz Steel factory. *Ahram Online* said Banha Engineering, “which provides shipment services for Ezz Steel companies nationwide, had faced similar problems in several other Ezz factories due to its non-compliance with an agreement it struck with its employers regarding wages and workers’ safety”.

Mohamed El Tahir, a syndicate member at Bahna Engineering Company, said, “Equipment provided to us by both Ezz Steel and Bahna’s management is endangering our lives, we are merely asking our management to respect the industrial safety codes.”

Egyptian gas bill collectors in two-week-long strike

Four hundred gas bill collectors took industrial action for over two weeks in December demanding higher wages.

The workers are employed by NATGAS, a private company, which collects gas bills in three Cairo districts as well as in 13 other governorates on behalf of the Egyptian Natural Gas Holding Company (EGAS). “The workers’ main demand is a rise in wages, consistent with NATGAS’ charter that is by EGAS. According to Mohamed Abul-Gheit, a bill collector from one of Cairo’s branches, the charter puts the minimum monthly wage for a collector at LE500 (\$82) plus some LE350 (\$57) as transportation allowance,” reported *Ahram Online*.

Although, in name, the company charter also gives workers the “right” to a bonus equivalent to 100 percent of the basic salary and a share of the company profits, most workers “only get a basic salary of LE400, a transportation allowance of LE150 and LE200 per month as profit sharing,” according to Abul-Gheit, who has been working as a bill collector for three years.

Israel’s Bezeq workers in solidarity with striking Pelephone workers

In the last week of December, Bezeq Israeli Telecommunication Co. Ltd. employees joined the strike by workers at subsidiary Pelephone Communications Ltd. over collective contracts.

Staff at Bezeq and Pelephone held a planned joint demonstration December 27.

Kenyan lecturers threaten strike

Lecturers at Masinde Muliro University in western Kenya may refuse to report for work when the university re-opens on Friday, January 4. The lecturers, members of the University Academic Staff Union (UASU), had taken action over a pay dispute in December resulting in the disruption of student examinations. However, according to the UASU the university has only paid a 17 percent pay increase rather than the agreed 33 percent, and a 4.4 percent allowance increase rather than the agreed 7 percent. The union has warned university authorities that if the agreed increases are not paid, the lecturers will begin a strike on Monday, January 7.

Council workers sacked at Zimbabwean municipality of Chitungwiza

Seventeen workers at Chitungwiza Municipal Council have been sacked. The 17, members of the Zimbabwe Urban and Rural Council workers union (ZURCWU), are some of the 700 workers suspended by the municipality for taking strike action in December. They had gone on strike to protest three months' arrears of salary.

Following government intervention the Labour Court ruled the strike illegal, but it continued. ZURCWU reported that the sacked workers were appealing the decision.

Demonstration by Zimbabwean poultry workers

Last week more than 400 workers at the Crest Breeders International (part of CFI conglomerate) facility in Beatrice in Mashonaland demonstrated. They were protesting the company's decision to put them on short working hours. Some have more than 30 years' service for CFI.

One worker told the press his salary had been reduced to US\$30 a month. Another explained she had not yet received her December paycheque.

South Sudanese public employees protest one day pay cut

Public employees in South Darfur held a protest last week following the government's decision to cut their December pay by one day, diverting the money to fund the war effort.

Sierra Leone diamond miners strike

Several hundred diamond miners working for the Israeli-owned Ocea Diamond Group mine in Kono district went on a sit-down strike the week before Christmas. It is the biggest diamond mine in the country.

The workers accused the mainly white South African management of racism. They were protesting management's plan to pay just one month's bonus rather than the promised three months, calling for the right to form a union and accusing the National Mineworkers Union of conniving with management.

On the fifth day of the strike, police intervened and two miners were shot dead. Following an intervention by Sierra Leone Vice President Samuel Sam-Sumana, the workers agreed to suspend their strike and return to work.



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